

VZCZCXRO8530
OO RUEHCI
DE RUEHIL #9711/01 1460459
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 260459Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9559
INFO RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY 9455
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 0614
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 3647
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0762
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1502
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 5391
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6537
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 8501
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 1282
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0803
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 3141
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 1067
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 8860
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 3516
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 6715
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 009711

SIPDIS

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2016

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR SUPPORTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN
PAKISTAN

ISLAMABAD 00009711 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Derived from DSCG 05-01, b and d

11. (C/NF) Summary: In an introductory call with the Ambassador on May 25, recently appointed Minister for Women's Development and Youth Affairs Sumaira Malik provided an overview of her key programmatic priorities, offering new and valuable areas for immediate and medium-term USG assistance. Malik assured the Ambassador that her top priority is repeal of discriminatory provisions of the Hudood Ordinances and further reform of honor killing legislation. The Ministry has already launched a surreptitious campaign to generate public demand on these issues intended to gin up legislative support. Complementing this campaign, the Ministry intends to embark shortly on awareness-raising activities designed to highlight women's rights and highlight full participation of women in Pakistani society. Recognizing the importance of improving protection for victims of violence against women, Malik intends to expand the Ministry's 20 crisis centers to every district of the country and establish a 24-hour hotline through which victims can seek the centers' support. Centers would be tied-in with the newly established crime cell in the Interior Ministry, which would assume responsibility for investigation of cases of violence against women. Emphasizing the need for economic empowerment of women, Malik discussed Ministry plans to establish skills centers and micro-credit schemes along the lines of the Grameen Bank to promote female entrepreneurship. Malik was eager for USG cooperation in these priority areas, and post believes these offer viable avenues to channel both immediate funds available from DRL and future funds from USAID. End Summary.

Repealing Discriminatory Legislation

12. (C/NF) In a May 25 meeting with the Ambassador, Minister of Women's Development and Youth Affairs Sumaira Malik emphasized the high priority she placed on prompt repeal of the remaining discriminatory legislation against women,

including the Hudood Ordinances. Malik stated that any legislation that is un-Islamic and/or that violates women's human rights had to go. She shared that the Ministry was working in concert with private television channels to launch a below-the-radar campaign to build support both for Hudood Ordinance repeal and Honor Killing Law reform. At the Ministry's request, private television channels had begun airing debates and news editorials on these issues to generate public awareness on and demand for the reform of this legislation. Private television station Geo has also purchased public service announcements in local English language daily The News, highlighting the need for Hudood Ordinance repeal. Through this public awareness and education strategy, Malik hopes to blunt the inevitable criticism that will come from Islamist quarters once the bills are introduced. The Ministry intends to introduce the bills in the National Assembly following conclusion of the budget session that takes place in June.

Improving Victim Protection

13. (C/NF) Malik admitted that local police have a poor track record on and little experience in the proper handling of cases of violence against women and that the federal government needed to do a better job of protection of victims of such crimes. At present, the Ministry operates 20 crisis centers that provide basic assistance and referral services for victims of violence against women. These centers exist principally in urban areas and their efficacy varies dramatically. Malik has obtained funds in the current budgetary cycle to expand the number of these centers and ensure that all are equipped, at a minimum, to provide free legal counseling services. Ultimately, Malik intends to establish a crisis center in each district, providing a full range of victim counseling and support services.

ISLAMABAD 00009711 002.2 OF 003

14. (C/NF) As a first step to improving victim access to these centers, the Ministry is launching a 24-hour helpline the week of May 29. This will connect victims directly to center staff who can provide immediate assistance in dealing with local law enforcement and obtaining protection. Malik is working with the Interior Ministry to have helpline staff linked to the newly established crime cell. Once this happens, the crime cell would assume responsibility for violence against women cases from local police services. Malik argued this would ensure better handling of such cases by trained police personnel and would prevent local influentials (feudal landlords, tribal chiefs, jirgas) from interfering in the investigation.

Economic Empowerment

15. (C/NF) Arguing that the GOP had done a great deal for the political empowerment of women (i.e., increased representation in legislative bodies at all levels), the next critical step is the economic empowerment of women. As a first step, Malik highlighted that in the upcoming budget she had secured funds to provide development money to local women councillors. This will enable them to launch appropriate women's development schemes in their districts. In addition, the Ministry is keen to examine possible federal support, including the establishment of skills training centers and micro-credit schemes similar to the Grameen Bank. In this way, female entrepreneurship could be promoted. Malik also expressed strong support for women's quotas. Ten percent of government civil service jobs have recently been set aside for women, and the Ministry is now pressing the private sector to follow suit. Publicizing female entrepreneurs will help convince other women that they too can participate actively in the economic/business sectors.

Public Relations

16. (C/NF) Malik was highly critical of her predecessors'

moribund public relations strategy that she claimed had failed to highlight the government's positive steps towards women's empowerment, lacked a strong public education message, and allowed an inaccurate picture of the country to be portrayed in the western media. Malik argued that a more proactive strategy could address these deficiencies. After the conclusion of the budget debate in June, Malik intends to launch a strategy that would include mass education for women (and men) about women's rights and opportunities through media and direct public meetings. As part of the strategy, the Ministry would highlight the achievements of successful women in the business, political, and academic fields and encourage others to follow in their footsteps. The Ambassador also encouraged Malik to highlight victims of abuse as part of the strategy in order to educate others about their experiences. Malik requested USG assistance in trying to change the negative image about women's rights in Pakistan in the western media. Ambassador noted that positive attention by the GOP in the area's discussed previously would no doubt receive substantial western media coverage.

Comment

17. (C/NF) Post feels strongly that the best way to promote women's rights in Pakistan is through direct, continuous engagement with the government. In the new Women's Development Minister, we have a constructive counterpart who has both a vision and concrete plans that can help to improve women's human rights in this country. Providing assistance to one or more of the various initiatives that she has identified as her priorities would have a significant impact.

We urge that immediate resources identified by DRL and medium-term resources projected by USAID should be utilized in support of the government's overall initiatives, rather

ISLAMABAD 00009711 003.2 OF 003

than one-off projects through NGOs or individuals. This would help to ensure sustainability, give us greater leverage over government policies in this area, encourage business participation in the proposed economic development projects, and allow us to multiply our limited resources with counterpart funding from the GOP. As an initial focus of our program, we would recommend that DRL funds be used to support the Ministry in the upgrade of a select number of women's crisis centers to provide full counseling and assistance services, as well as to establish a credible working relationship between the centers and the Ministry of Interior's crime cell. End Comment.
CROCKER